



Maricopa County
Animal Care and Control



SELECTING THE RIGHT PET FOR YOU

Commitment

When you decide to bring a pet into your family, you and each member of your household needs to be prepared to make a 10 to 20 year commitment. This commitment will involve providing the animal with food, shelter, health care, grooming and loving attention for its entire lifetime.

Pet Personalities

Every animal is an individual with a unique personality and special characteristics all his own. Some traits are inherited, some are learned. When choosing a pet, look for certain characteristics that will fit into your lifestyle. While physical characteristics play an important part in your choice, it is best to make a list of desirable traits to look for in a potential pet. This will help you to incorporate the right animal into your life.

- ✓ **Size:** Large or small; this can be anything from a dog whose head comes up to your chest or something that will fit into a teacup. Determine how big or small you want dog to be as an adult.

If your landlord or homeowners' association has a weight or size restriction for pets, you need to include that in your list. If you are adopting a puppy, you need to know how big it will be when full-grown.

- ✓ **Coat:** A long-haired dog or cat will require daily or at least weekly brushing and some will need to be professionally groomed. No matter what you've heard, all animals shed; be prepared to make use of your vacuum cleaner. A tape roller will also come in handy.

A note about allergies: If someone in your household has animal allergies, please be aware that there are no specific breeds of dogs or cats that are absolutely non-allergenic. An Allergist can help you determine if you are allergic to cats or dogs. You may also be allergic to the grass or dust animals may carry in from outdoors.

- ✓ **Activity Levels:** Dogs such as retrievers and hearing types tend to have high activity levels and need to be challenged both physically and mentally. If you are a couch potato, this type of breed may not be right for you. The same holds true for more active breeds of cats, such as Siamese and Abyssinians.
- ✓ **Tolerance Levels With Children:** Some animals are more tolerant to children than others. Children need to understand that a pet is not a toy. Many animals, especially very small dogs, may be fearful of being surprised, threatened, injured or having possessions disturbed. Very young children should always be supervised by a responsible adult when interacting with a pet.

It's difficult for pets to understand the sounds and uncoordinated movements of young children, and it's hard for those children to understand when the pet says "stop". While many parents think they want a pet for the children, the care of the pet must primarily be the responsibility of the parent(s). Children can be given responsible "chores" such as feeding, grooming and playing with the pet.

The Right Age

The great majority of people wanting to adopt a pet prefer very young puppies or kittens. Puppies and kittens are babies and require a lot of time, care and energy. Many households are not prepared to provide the large quantities of time and patience required to train an animal in the first 6 months to 1 year of its life.

A pet of any age can bond with people who love and care for it. If you want a pet with certain personality traits, you are more likely to find a good match if the candidate is at least six months old. If you don't have the patience or energy for a "teenager", you should consider an adult dog or cat who is at least 1 year to 18 months old. As a rule, dogs and cats this age learn quickly, have more coordination and control over their physical functions, and have more predictable natures.

- ✓ **Time:** For working families who must leave a pet alone for more than six hours at a time, a puppy or kitten may require much more time and attention than you are able to devote to it. Many adult dogs may be able to more easily adjust to your schedule. Cats fit into this type of lifestyle much more easily.
- ✓ **Selection Process:** Having a pet is a family commitment. Each family member should be involved in the selection process. Each member of the family should be willing to have a pet and to share the caretaking responsibility.
- ✓ **Other Pets:** When you find a dog you would like to add to your household, it is a very good idea to bring any resident dog(s) you may have to the adoption center with you for an initial introduction. If they get along at this point, this increases the chance that they will get along at home. This method will not work as well with cats and is not advised.

Keep in mind that if you already have an older dog or cat at home, the energy level of a very young puppy or kitten may be too much for the older animal to tolerate. This can cause friction between the animals.

✓ Giving Pets As Gifts:

NEVER A GOOD IDEA!

The holiday season can be an active, hectic time. A new pet at this time can end up being cast aside with the rest of the gifts. It is best to get a pet when you can focus all your attention on it.

If you plan to give someone else a pet as a surprise, consider that this person may not be ready for a pet, may not want a pet, or may not like the pet that you choose.

MCACC offers pet gift certificates that are redeemable for a year. This is a much less stressful way to give a pet as a gift.

Pets can bring so much joy to our lives. Owning a pet should be a pleasant, fulfilling experience that will last for many years. Choose your new companion wisely.